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SUBJECT: GEORGIAN PERMREP HOLDS BRAINSTORMING SESSION ON
ABKHAZIA WITH NEW YORK FRIENDS

11. (SBU) Summary: The Georgian Mission to the UN is getting busy. On November 3, Georgian Permrep Irakli Alasania hosted the New York Friends for a discussion titled "on a comprehensive peaceful solution to the conflict in Abkhazia." Alasania made obvious efforts to be accommodating to the Russian representative, as Russia's UN Mission had refused to attend the discussion under its original billing "on internationalizing the peacekeeping format for Abkhazia." The Russian representative, although presenting his views in a collegial fashion throughout, focused his comments almost entirely on calls for Georgia to speedily implement portions of UNSCR 1716 addressing Georgia's Kodori operation. In a November 17 meeting with poloffs, scheduled at his request, Alasania advocated the internationalization of police in Gali as a first step toward a more general internationalization of foreign security forces. End summary.

Alasania Seeks Input, Including Criticism

12. (SBU) On November 3, Georgian Permrep Irakli Alasania hosted the New York Friends (US, UK, France, Germany, Russia and Slovakia) at his mission for a brainstorming session on the subject of "a comprehensive peaceful solution to the conflict in Abkhazia." Throughout the meeting Alasania made an obvious effort to be as accommodating as possible to Russia's views; the Russians had declined to attend the meeting under its original billing as a discussion on "internationalizing the peacekeeping format for Abkhazia." Alasania opened the meeting by expressing pleasure that Russia agreed to participate, saying that "as a member of the Friends and as facilitator, Russia's involvement is indispensable." Alasania noted that the meeting between Foreign Ministers Bezhuashvili and Lavrov in Moscow earlier in the week had helped Georgia and Russia understand one another's concerns on important issues, including Abkhazia.

13. (SBU) Alasania then invited the Friends to help him think about how to proceed in New York and produce new, effective approaches on Abkhazia. By way of example, Alasania suggested that now that controversy surrounding Georgia's Kodori operation had settled down, the Friends might revisit the once-promising agreement on non-resumption of hostilities to see if it were ripe again for discussion. Alasania raised UNSCR 1716 that renewed UNOMIG's mandate, saying it had to be implemented, including portions calling for improved conditions for returnees and opening a human rights office in Gali. He invited input on what the New York Friends thought could be achieved at the next Friends meeting in Geneva and what actions Georgia might take to show its commitment to solving the problem only through peaceful means. Alasania likewise invited ideas on how Georgia could work with the Abkhaz to ensure they follow through on previous Geneva commitments. Furthermore, Alasania said we should also

reflect on how Russia could be more successful as a facilitator because he thought it obvious that the present arrangement with Russian CIS peacekeepers alone was not successful. He thought in particular that we ought to consider tackling law enforcement in Gali or even DFM Karasin's suggestion of expanding the CIS force to include other CIS countries.

New York Friends Offer Questions and Suggestions

14. (SBU) Germany's Deputy Permrep asked Alasania what internationalization within the CIS might look like. Alasania replied that no other CIS countries had volunteered to be troop contributors and, in fact, no non-CIS countries had volunteered either. He said Russian peacekeepers clearly were needed at some level to give the Abkhaz a sense of security. However, it was a heavy burden for Russia alone as evidenced by the fact that over a 100 of its peacekeepers had been killed in the past ten years. He stated that it had been a brave step for the Russians to come in alone in the 90's. However, we couldn't stick just with the format of 12 years ago, said Alasania, because the region had evolved. On criminality in Gali in particular, Alasania noted that even the head of the CIS force had said he could not grapple with criminality as his forces were not trained to handle it.

15. (SBU) Vadim Smirnov the Russian Political Counselor in New York (who before the meeting started conspicuously joined Alasania and the Friends in a glass Georgian wine) stated that he was pleased to hear that the Georgian side had taken Bezhuashvili's meeting with Lavrov seriously because it had laid out "what needed to be done to achieve more normalized relations." He decried, however, that the Georgian Mission had originally advertised the day's meeting as one on

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changing the peacekeeping format in Abkhazia, changed it to a generalized discussion of the Abkhazia conflict, but seemed to be trying to revert the focus to peacekeeping formats that Russia preferred not to discuss. Smirnov said we should indeed prioritize and look at what the sides could do, but that should come at a later stage only "after UNSCR 1716 was fully implemented," including talking about Kodori and adherence to the Moscow agreement. Alasania rebutted the Russian, querying him on whether he "meant that we should try to bring back Kvitsani" and pointing out that the Kodori operation had made possible the resumption of joint patrols. On violations, Alasania said he took issue with the UN's analysis of the violations, but agreed that there probably had been some violations. Alasania asked Smirnov what steps he would recommend, to which the Russian replied that Russia was only the facilitator and not a party to the conflict, but the resolution had confirmed "the important role of CIS forces and cooperation with the UN and these should be fully implemented first." Later, the Russian asked Alasania why he thought the Abkhaz were resisting accepting police and Alasania answered that he thought the Abkhaz wanted to avoid a permanent international presence. He asked Alasania whether Police would still be needed if we increased confidence, but Alasania replied that they would be because the Abkhaz could not agree to participate in Georgian law enforcement structures and would thus need the political cover of something international. Alasania said he hoped that Russia would help get the Abkhaz to agree to civilian police in Gali because the track record had proved that "when Russia wants to get something done in Gali, it gets done."

16. (SBU) USUN's Deputy Political Counselor suggested to Alasania that instead of looking at the situation on the ground from a supply side, perhaps we should step back and look at the totality of need in terms of what it would take to accomplish our goals on law enforcement and return of refugees. In other words, in addition to the approximately 1700 CIS forces and 120 UNOMIG observers, what would it take, setting aside for a moment the color of the uniforms, to get

the job done? USUN also reiterated the US position that and all violations of the Moscow agreement by either side should be properly recognized, but that we did not criticize the Kodori operation in principle, especially given that the joint patrols had resulted from it. Alasania responded that there was an urgent need for police on the ground in Gali as there was currently no sense of security there. He said that just a few hundred police would be sufficient. At the same time, argued Alasania, we should also get the Abkhaz to agree to the 20 civilian police that had been authorized in the first place. The French expert said the situation in Abkhazia was frustrating, but we should avoid hasty steps that would make things worse. There were many things in UNSCR 1716 that needed to be implemented: the situation in Kodori should be "brought back into line with the Moscow Agreement, no more, no less", the resumption of joint patrols was an important step that "we should welcome and not just note with satisfaction", civilian police and international police in Gali would be a very good idea that was embraced by Jean Arnault. The UK's expert that he agreed UNSCR 1716 was a basis for steps that we should take even if it was not agreed with Russia that "the result of the Kodori operation had been a situation in breach of the Moscow agreement and that this should be addressed as a priority." The UK expert also said he agreed "the Kodori operation had resulted in an increase in tension." If there were unilateral steps the Georgian side could take to build confidence that would be beneficial. Talking about internationalizing the peacekeeping format was a topic that "raised concern and suspicions, but civilian police could be a very good idea and were hard to argue against." At one point in the meeting, Alasania also stated that he was lobbying hard to get rid of all remaining sanctions on the Abkhaz.

Georgia and Kosovo

17. (SBU) As the meeting drew to a close, Alasania asked those present for informal thoughts on how the conclusion of the Kosovo Future Status Process could affect Georgia. This precipitated a long debate between the Russian and the UK's Deputy Permrep (a Balkans expert) in which the Russians argued that the resolution of Kosovo's status could set a precedent for other conflicts unless it "is resolved in the correct way" and the UK argued that the UN Security Council had always viewed distinct problems completely separately and that there had never been a single case of linking problems in different parts of the world, so we should not risk

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adverse consequences by changing that now. USUN's Deputy Political Counselor cited a recent Wall Street Journal article calling Kosovo "a region administered by the UN that was formerly part of a state that no longer existed -- hardly a precedent for anything."

Alasania Suggests International Police in Gali Might Satisfy Tblisi's Concerns

18. (SBU) In a November 17 meeting with poloffs, scheduled at his request, Alasania said the internationalization of police in Gali could be a first step toward a more general internationalization of foreign security forces. He said that if some agreement on this could be reached among all the Friends at the next Geneva meeting, he could probably convince Tblisi to back off from plans to insist on the withdrawal of CIS peacekeepers from Abkhazia. Alasania said that he had in general terms pitched such a compromise to Russian Permrep Churkin in a meeting earlier that same day, but Churkin had been noncommittal on police in Gali and said he needed to consult with Ambassador Bocharnikov.

BOLTON